

# **A Sermon**

**Preached in  
Memory of Mrs. S. Weir Mitchell, in  
St. Stephen's Church, Philadelphia,  
January 25, 1914**

**BY THE RECTOR**

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This sermon is published that it may be read by those who were not present on the Sunday, when it was preached, and especially that it may be in the possession of the members of the Female Benevolent Society in which Mrs. Mitchell worked so long, so faithfully, and so lovingly.

**An epistle of Christ \* \* \* written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.**

—2 Cor. 3: 3.

These words of St. Paul to his Corinthian converts express the relation of a Christian to his fellow men. In so far as he is moulded and inspired by the spirit of God, he is a message from God to man. If he attains world-wide eminence, he becomes a message to the world, a catholic epistle. If he is only known to a limited circle, he is an epistle to that particular church. If the power of certain doctrines is a prominent characteristic of his life, he is a doctrinal epistle. If the practical and ethical side of life is more in evidence he is a practical epistle. If the nature revealed is subjective and intense, we have an epistle like second Corinthians. If the revelation is a manifestation of convictions and beliefs, but leaves the central personality undisclosed we have an epistle like the Epistle to the Hebrews. Various are the messages, that come to us from these different epistles; some preach hope, and some show the beauty of patience; some reveal the power and comfort of prayer, and some disclose the peace that comes from love and service. But all are messages to the world from the self-same spirit who divideth to every man severally as he will.



Dr. Mitchell was an epistle that had a lesson for the world in the realm of medicine, and a message for this whole community on many subjects. I wish to speak this morning particularly of Mrs. Mitchell who was in a special sense an epistle to this congregation. Greatly was she loved and admired in this church. If Dr. Mitchell was unquestionably our most eminent communicant, Mrs. Mitchell was unmistakably one of our best beloved members. Now that death has unsealed our lips, and we can speak freely of her, let me read aloud in your hearing the epistle that God has left us in her example, so far as I can decipher it, and tell to those in the congregation who may not have known her, what manner of woman she was.

Her ancestry is full of religious interest, for her forefathers were sufferers for conscience-sake. Through her father, General Thomas Cadwalader, she was a descendant of the early Welsh settlers of Pennsylvania. William Penn himself was of Welsh stock. The teachings of George Fox made many converts among the gentry of Wales, chiefly through one of Cromwell's "Triers," John Ap-John. According to the rule of the great Protector all forms of ordination and worship were permitted, if they were found to be wholesome and helpful in the judgment of his various boards of Triers. Ap-John, as one of these triers, attended a service at which George Fox spoke with a view to ascertaining the nature of the latter's doctrine. He became a convert to the new teaching and carried it back to Wales, where it gained many adherents among

the gentry, especially in the ancient Gwynedd, in the North, of which the modern Merioneth-shire is a part. When Penn published his scheme of a colony on the Delaware in which liberty of worship would be permitted, these Welsh Friends, who had been much harassed by the intolerant and revengeful laws enacted by the royalist parliament under Charles II, entered eagerly into the scheme. They settled just west of the Schuylkill, where the Welsh names, Haverford, Merion, Bryn Mawr, Bala, and Radnor are their legacy. Around Radnor there were so many Welsh who could not understand English, that in seeking a minister for their church, appropriately named St. David's, after the national saint of Wales, they required that he should be able to minister in Welsh as well as English. Indeed they had some hopes of being able to retain the native speech of their principality. To this Welsh immigration Philadelphia has owed some of its leading citizens. Everyone knows that Cadwalader is a Welsh name; but so are Davies, Evans, Edwards, John, Johns, Jones, Howell, Henry, Lewis, Morris, Morgan, Owen, Price, Paul, Penn, Richards, Roberts, Thomas, Williams and Wynne. The list might be extended.

One of the most prominent of these early Welsh settlers was Dr. Thomas Wynne, an ancestor of Mrs. Mitchell's. The original name of Chestnut street was Wynne street. The memory of the important part that this family once bore in the city's life has been pre-



served in Dr. Mitchell's most popular novel, *Hugh Wynne*.

If Celtic mysticism took kindly to the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light, the Celtic love of conflict was opposed to the peculiar tenet of non-resistance. In the Revolutionary war a great many Welshmen broke away from Meeting and joined the patriots. Chief among these Welsh fighters were the Cadwaladers. Indeed this family played as leading a part in the Revolutionary struggle in Pennsylvania as the Adamses bore in Massachusetts or the Lees in Virginia. Like that immortal Welsh soldier, the incomparable Fluelen its members combined great personal amiability with an ardent love of war both on its adventurous and its technical sides. General John Cadwalader, as every Pennsylvanian knows, was one of the boldest and most aggressive of Washington's brigadiers, one of the loyalest of the loyal to his great chief in opposition to Conway's cabal as well as one of the bravest of the brave. And General Thomas Cadwalader his son, although only a militia general, was such an expert in drill, that he was one of the government's experts in the composition of the official manual. General John Cadwalader's brother was Col. Lambert Cadwalader who was Mrs. Mitchell's grandfather. In spite of its Quaker origin, it was, we see a preeminently military family. Dr. Thomas Cadwalader, the father of Washington's famous brigadier, presided at great meetings that protested against

the tyrannical aggressions of England. But though so stout for principle, he had withal an unusually cheerful and amiable address. He is described as "remarkable for the tenderness of his disposition, constantly blessed with a serene mind, rarely depressed by bad, not unduly elated by good fortune," a description that would apply with great propriety, with a change of the pronouns, to his great granddaughter Mrs. Mitchell. The celebrated free thinker Thomas Paine wrote an epitaph on General John Cadwalader in which he expressly mentions his entire freedom from the least degree of malevolence or party spirit. Amiability and courtesy joined with decision of character and courage, were evidently family characteristics. They were all richly inherited by Mrs. Mitchell.

On her mother's side she was the granddaughter of Nicholas Gouverneur of New York, and so was a descendant of those Huguenot emigrants, that Dr. Mitchell has drawn with so much sympathetic appreciation—a great people, dear to all lovers of religion whose native vivacity, schooled by adversity and strengthened by firm faith in a God who rules, as well as exists, has made them a quickening leaven wherever they have been dispersed abroad.

The incidents of her life before her marriage to Dr. Mitchell are unknown to me; but in my walks with Dr. Mitchell in the last few years, while he was writing his last novel "*Westways*," whose opening



chapters are such a fresh and interesting picture of the social life in Pennsylvania before the Civil war, he explained to me the manner in which in early days the great mine owners or land owners in this section lived on their estates, and supported his generalizations by incidents, that occurred on General Cadwalader's estate in New Jersey, and by conditions and relations that there existed, so that I am convinced that the life at "Westways" gives an approximately accurate description of the home life of Mrs. Mitchell's youth, when she was living in the country.

Her brother, Mr. John L. Cadwalader was Dr. Mitchell's dearest friend and it was probably through him, that she met her future husband. When in Philadelphia, the Cadwalader family attended St. Stephen's. After her father's death one of Mrs. Mitchell's first acts was the purchase of the pew in St. Stephen's which had been his, and the presentation of it to the church, subject to her use for life. Her only child, Maria Gouverneur Mitchell, an earnest worker in the church, who died at the early age of 22 is commemorated by the exquisite and poetic monument by the great sculptor St. Gaudens, that stands on our east wall, just north of the reredos. After this bereavement Mrs. Mitchell gave \$10,000 to St. Stephen's farm, an institution where girls and women are given outings in summer. She was resolved that her daughter's influence should be perpetuated by benefits conferred on the less advantaged. This farm was always a favorite benevolence

with her. Every Easter her check for \$500 towards its support could be counted on. She wrote to the treasurer that she liked to think when she went away from the city for the summer that she was helping others also to an outing. Matthew Arnold's lines on his father, the great schoolmaster, apply to her also:

But thou wouldst not alone,  
Be saved, my father! alone  
Conquer and come to thy goal,  
Leaving the rest in the wild.

Still thou turnedst, and still  
Gavest the weary thy hand;  
If in the paths of the world  
Stones might have wounded thy feet,  
Toil or dejection have tried  
Thy spirit, of that we saw  
Nothing—to us thou wast still  
Cheerful and helpful and firm.

This is a true description of Mrs. Mitchell. Miss Lewis could tell many a story of her solicitude for the erring, her patience, her long-suffering efforts to reclaim and keep, her interest in the former members in her daughter's Sunday School class. I have always regretted that the farm was not opened early enough for Mrs. Mitchell to see it in operation before she left the city for the summer, and that it closed before her return, for I should have liked her to see its workings and its visitors. It is proper that those who administer such benefactions should receive if they admin-



ister wisely and lovingly, some of the gratitude of those who partake of the benefit; but it is a great mistake if the gratitude does not reach back to the liberal givers, who though standing in the background, are still the chief supporters of the whole enterprise. The excesses, extravagances and insolences of the prodigal and idle rich are rightly condemned as sources of bitterness and social unrest, but the scales of justice must hang true and the less prosperous among us must not overlook the blessings that flow down from the wealth of faithful stewards of God's gifts, like Mrs. Mitchell.

Great as were these gifts of money, I count her greatest contribution to this church her example of personal service. She was not content to give money and allow some one else to do the work. For over thirty years she was a regular worker in the Benevolent Society, spending every Wednesday morning, when she was in town, about two hours in its ministrations. In constant demand in the social life of the city; the hostess of eminent visitors like the Gov. General of Canada, Earl Grey, or the President of the United States; burdened with many social obligations and as it proved weighed down with more years than we knew; she was still constant at her post. What she was to her fellow-workers is revealed in the message of sympathy that her fellow members sent to her on the death of Dr. Mitchell, which I cannot forbear reading here, though I shall publish it in the Parish News.

To Mary Cadwalader Mitchell, our oldest and best beloved member:

WHEREAS, Our Heavenly Father in His omniscient wisdom has called to rest your husband, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, revered as a distinguished physician and as a man of letters, who both by his high order of ability and by the distinction that he brought to this city had endeared himself to his fellow citizens; now we in behalf of the co-workers with you in the Female Benevolent Society of St. Stephen's Church, extend to you, in your great loss and bereavement, loving sympathy, and in these few lines convey to you the knowledge that you are enshrined in the hearts of each one of us.

Her relation to the women who are helped by the society was a characteristic blending of cheerful kindness, practical philanthropy and shrewd common sense. She cared for them, and contributed liberally to help the work; but she had real insight and could not be wheedled or cajoled, being a true lover of righteousness.

Her philanthropic activities were not limited to St. Stephens. Not only was she a member of the board of management of the church home for girls at Angora, but she was also actively interested in the girls themselves. Every Sunday afternoon when she was in Philadelphia—except when too ill to go out of the house, and in that case she always sent a substitute—she read aloud for two to three hours in the wards of the Orthopædic Hospital, where Dr. Mitchell's work had deeply interested them both.

The strength of her character was not revealed, as is the case with so many people, in a passion for domination, for she was extraordinarily free from any



such ambition or weakness, the atmosphere in which she lived being one of kindly and helpful comradeship; but in her ability to be herself whatever the pressure might be. Closely united with the powerful mind, and immense will force of Dr. Mitchell, who was accustomed from the very nature of his calling as a great neurologist, not only to penetrate into the workings of troubled minds, but also to dominate or brace other wills, Mrs. Mitchell was always serenely, and naturally, not a reflex or echo of her eminent husband, but her own bright, cheerful, decisive self. In part we must ascribe this great achievement to Doctor Mitchell's knightly respect for his wife's personality; but in part, it was also due to the inherent vigor of Mrs. Mitchell's own strong and thoroughly honest nature. Her unswerving integrity of character and unfaltering carrying out of whatever she believed to be her duty were recognized by all her friends. This strength and self-control she revealed preeminently in the noble patience and submission with which she bore the great grief of her life, the loss of her daughter, and in her courage during the last sickness of Dr. Mitchell.

Before I speak of these last days I must say a word about the characteristics of Mrs. Mitchell's churchmanship. She was a thoroughly loyal person, accepting a new rector, not as a person to be scrutinized and judicially valued; but as a leader who was to be helped and esteemed for his work's sake. Common worship was to her a bond of fellowship. It was her particular desire that Mr. Miller should have some part in the

funeral of Dr. Mitchell. She wished to hear at that time the voice that had led the devotions in the days when her daughter knelt in the pew beside her, and that had sounded at that daughter's burial. When I came up to see her at her request after Dr. Mitchell's death, she laid her hand affectionately on my shoulder and said "We understand one another. I shall be back in my place helping you soon." Her affection was not exclusive; but inclusive. Her loyalty to Mr. Miller did not exclude me, and she included with me all the members of my family, whose position as new comers in a great city, she appreciated and sought to make less lonely by many friendly attentions and courtesies. In the same inclusive spirit she did not limit her charities and kind offices to her own church. She was in thorough sympathy with the spirit of St. Stephen's which does not restrict its helpfulness to its own members. The first time I saw her in the Benevolent Society, she was giving some work to a Presbyterian. "We think well of Presbyterians here," said Mrs. Mitchell in her bright, outspoken way. Her spirit was liberal and loving. The forms of worship and government were with her subordinate to the spirit. She was a true American, and had no yearnings for medievalism in doctrine, or feudalism in the pastoral relation.

Sickness and death are great revealers, and the heroic nature of Mrs. Mitchell was disclosed in her last days. On one Sunday, Dr. Mitchell was dining at his son's house in good health, and on the next



Sunday his pew was draped and he had another morn than ours. Her great husband had gone from her, as the sun sinks in the tropics all at once, when at one stride comes the dark. But as a gallant bark rides the whelming wave, so her spirit mounted with her grief. Her wonderful courage made me realize vividly that she came of a race of soldiers. I recalled Morley's description of Cromwell, that most religious of all great captains, "He was a strong man, and in the deep perils of war, in the high places of the field, hope shone in him like a pillar of fire, when it had gone out in all others". Such was her spirit. One felt that if Dr. Mitchell was a great man, Mrs. Mitchell was a great woman, that she shone by no reflected light and would have been essentially what she was, whatever the outward conditions of her life.

"It is all well," she cried, when she saw me. "I would not have it otherwise. It is a fitting close to a life of duty." The end had at last crowned a great achievement and she felt what the hero-poet Milton has so well expressed:

"Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail  
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt  
Dispraise or blame—nothing but well and fair  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble."

The night after Dr. Mitchell's funeral she said to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. John K. Mitchell "I shall take up my life tomorrow morning in all its home routine exactly as usual, because for many years

I have ordered it as I thought right and so I am sure that God will help me, and I think it is the best tribute to Dr. Mitchell's memory to go bravely on and perhaps it won't be for long—oh perhaps it won't be for long." A few days later she died in a certain faith and a great joy.

Sore indeed is the loss of this church, but we can not wish her back. They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and it is good that in death they should not be long divided.

We shall miss them both. But we have witnessed the completion of a well-run course, and rejoice that they were spared long pain and feebleness and a long separation.

We thank God for their lives and examples, and praise him for their death. "Brave great spirits, they went down like suns, and left upon the mountain tops of death a light which makes them lovely."

At the conclusion of the sermon, these lines by Dr. Mitchell were sung as a solo :

I know the night is soon at hand,  
The mists lie low on hill and bay,  
The autumn sheaves are dewless, dry,  
But I have had the day,

Yes, I have had, dear Lord, the day;  
When at Thy call, I have the night,  
Brief be the twilight as I pass  
From light to dark, from dark to light.